

Riding in the Rain & Cold- Straight Up and Slow Please

- Steve Warmath



At the last meeting I asked Jeanne Giuliani to give members some insight into her experience while on a wet and cold trip to Raleigh, NC for HOG Officer Training. It was pretty scary to hear how her extremities became numb, had uncontrollable shaking and decreased mental acuity. Understandably, I received several requests afterwards to post an article about riding in the rain as well as the effects of hypothermia. I know, winter is pretty much gone, but even in the summer at higher elevations the temperature during a frog choker, down-draft thunderstorm, the temperature can drop 20 plus degrees very quickly. Combine a drop in temperature with being wet and exposed to the wind while riding can suck off body heat faster than a New York minute.

The Rain- Most riders get used to riding in the rain by accident. They take off on an all-day ride when the sun is shining and by afternoon they realize they're going to get their first taste of wet asphalt, like it or not. Those who accept it soon find themselves venturing back into the rain, sometimes at their own will. Many never ride in the rain the first year they're up on two wheels. They're timid about it the second year, feeling more confident by the third and by the fourth year they're asking the question

"What Rain?"

So suppose you're thinking about getting on a wet road for the first time, or perhaps you've done it a few times, or perhaps you do it so much you're not thinking about what the hazards are. Here's a list of critical rain hazards to watch for:

Painted Lines - Crosswalks can be unsafe for motorcyclists, particularly if you're turning right or left and crossing the lines at an angle. Slow down more than usual and make the turn straight up, rather than in a lean. It's the same for **diamonds** in the HOV lanes. They are very nasty when you lean into one, especially on the freeway. The diamond is shaped so you just slide across it and continue to slide along it. Any painted line is a hazard. Until the DOT addresses the issue and comes up with a tackier texture, you're the one in control of your destiny.

Surface Textures - Many commercial and residential parking areas are paved with very **slick concrete surfaces**. Your wet entry into the local mall or condo complex can put you on the ground in a second. Again, ride slow and straight up and don't let the concrete bite you.

Rubber - If you thought you might save some money by buying **long lasting tires**, think again. Such tires are typically not as tacky and have less traction when the rain comes out. Next time you change tires look for the tackiest one that will take care of you better during your wet riding adventures. How about that **rubber they use around railroad tracks** to decrease the sound as cars drive over them? Forget those little circles on the surface, they provide zero traction to you as you cross.

Steel - **Manhole covers** are enemy number one and **railroad tracks** rank a close second. Making a turn over the surface of them sets you up for trouble. Avoid such, or keep the bike straight up and cross over it slowly. Railroad tracks have a way of popping up on you just after a turn and you may



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still be into a lean when you reach them. Look for the crossing signs ahead of time, slow down and stay straight up when crossing. **Grated bridge crossings** and **metal plates** are a nasty encounter in the rain. Look at where you want to ride, take it slow and don't try any fancy dancing, particularly a lane change.

Water - **Puddles/Potholes** - It only takes once to know how this one feels. You cruise through a puddle and after it's too late you realize you just went into a pothole that wants to suck you into the underworld more painfully than Satan himself beating you down with a stick. Avoid puddles if you can. Use caution and predict the possibility ahead of time. Hydroplaning will dump you in a heart-beat. Plowing through standing water at speeds approximately 9 times the square root of your tire pressure is dangerous. If you carry 36 psi in your tires, hydroplaning can occur at speeds around **54 mph or less**. Recovery from this rude awakening is not always easy or even possible.

Oil - It's everywhere and very illusive. Those little red and blue rainbows on the ground mean danger. Ride slow and straight up. If you're caught in the first rain following a few dry days remember the roads are covered with lots of oil and dirt that will be lifted from the surface in the first 30-60 minutes of a new rain. Take a coffee break if you can and let the rain clean off the road.

The Cold- Cold weather can affect your body in different ways. You can get [frostbite](#), which is frozen body tissue. Your body can also lose heat faster than you can produce it. The result is hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature. It can make you sleepy, confused and clumsy. Because it happens gradually and affects your thinking, you may not realize you need help. That makes it especially dangerous. A body temperature below 95° F is a medical emergency and can lead to death if not treated promptly. Anyone who spends much time outdoors in cold weather can get hypothermia. You can also get it from being **cold and wet** or under cold water for too long. Babies and older people are especially at risk. Babies can get it from sleeping in a cold room.



HYPOTHERMIA

The condition of low internal body heat dropping steadily from a healthy 98.6, and if not reversed, can bring fatal consequences. Hypothermia can develop without much warning. Dress for the weather and avoid getting wet or damp. Generally, hypothermia is characterized by uncontrollable shivering. Mild hypothermia can be treated by drinking warm liquids, and by taking a hot shower. A more serious condition requires medical attention.

The body maintains a relatively stable temperature whereby heat production is balanced by heat loss. Normally, the core body temperature is 98.6 degrees F or 37 degrees C. When the outside environment gets too cold or the body's heat production decreases, hypothermia occurs (hypo=less + thermia=temperature). This is a very uncomfortable condition.

Hypothermia is defined as having a core body temperature less than 95 degrees F or 35 degrees C. Body temperature is controlled in the part of the brain called the [hypothalamus](#), which is responsible for recognizing alterations in the body temperature and responding appropriately. The body produces heat through the [metabolic](#) processes in cells that support vital body functions.

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